

**Remarks at the White House  
Strategy Meeting on Children,  
Violence, and Responsibility**

*May 10, 1999*

***Bombing of Chinese Embassy in Belgrade***

Before I make my opening remarks, I would like to begin by saying a word about the tragic bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade. I have already expressed our apology and our condolences to President Jiang and to the Chinese people. And I have reaffirmed my commitment to strengthen our relationship with China.

But I think it's very important to remember that this was an isolated, tragic event, while the ethnic cleansing of Kosovo, which has led to the killing of thousands of people and the relocation of hundreds of thousands, is a deliberate and systematic crime. Until NATO's simple conditions are met, therefore, the military campaign will continue.

But again, I want to say to the Chinese people and to the leaders of China, I apologize; I regret this. But I think it is very important to draw a clear distinction between a tragic mistake and a deliberate act of ethnic cleansing. And the United States will continue to make that distinction.

***White House Strategy Meeting***

Now, let me say as I look around this room today, I want to say on behalf of the Vice President and Mrs. Gore, and Hillary and myself, first, we appreciate all of you coming. This is a very diverse and distinguished group of Americans. We have leaders of Congress from both parties here; leaders of the faith community; we have activists among parents and students and educators, and people in music and people in the entertainment communities; people who represent the gun manufacturers of our country. This is a truly impressive and diverse array of Americans.

Obviously, we have asked you to come here to see what we can do together to give our children safer childhoods. The four of us, both individually and together, have worked on many of the matters that will be discussed here today for years. We have made particular efforts to give our children safe streets and safe schools.

But I think that we, and the members of the Cabinet and the administration who are here, like all Americans, were profoundly affected by the events in Littleton, Colorado, coming as they did after so many tragic incidents in our schools last year. And we were determined to see what we could do to bring the American people together, to get beyond the divisions that often attend many of the subjects here, which is not to say that we shouldn't have a serious discussion today, and to try to move forward on something really big that can make a difference.

Now, last Friday I announced, therefore, that we would launch a national campaign to prevent youth violence, a grassroots effort that would involve all Americans, from every community and all walks of life. I expect the ideas and recommendations generated here today in our discussion to lay the groundwork, the common groundwork for that campaign. We are not here to place blame but to shoulder responsibility.

In the weeks to come, I will work with Congress to pass legislation that makes our schools and streets safer and keeps guns out of the wrong hands, because that's part of our responsibility. And again I want to say how very much I appreciate the representatives of the gun manufacturers for being here today and supporting some of the specific legislative proposals that have already been publicized.

Today I'm also directing the Surgeon General to prepare the first report in more than a decade on youth violence and its causes. This report will infuse our efforts with new understanding and new urgency.

Let me just briefly say that, with representatives of the manufacturers of guns today, I want to say to the press and to the public that we have found common grounds on some common sense measures: banning violent juveniles from buying guns, raising the age for handgun ownership from 18 to 21, closing the gun show loophole, holding reckless parents responsible for giving children access to guns, reducing illegal gun trafficking by helping law enforcement trace weapons used in crimes. Again, I commend the gun manufacturers here today for taking that kind of responsibility. Others have agreed to do their part.

A few years ago, through the Vice President's leadership, we were able to put in place a voluntary rating system for television. Les Moonves, the head of CBS, and Bob Iger, the head of ABC, have led the way by putting their networks behind this effort. They are here today, and they went to some considerable trouble to change their schedules to do so, and I appreciate their presence.

This year, half the new TV sets sold in America will contain the V-chip, which parents can use to protect their children from violent programming. Today the FCC is announcing a V-Chip Task Force to make sure that next year every new set contains the V-chip. And the Kaiser Family Foundation is announcing a massive new public education campaign to make sure parents know about it and know how to use it. Also, following this meeting, Kaiser and the Ad Council, also represented here, will produce a campaign of antiviolent ads called "Talking With Kids About Tough Issues."

Last week the Vice President also announced a voluntary agreement by 95 percent of the Internet service providers to offer parents a new tool to assure that they are only one click away from the resources they need to protect their children. And I thank the representatives of the Internet for being here today.

Let me also say that we know that profoundly important efforts are being made in our schools and our communities in efforts to involve parents in increasing their capacity to prevent their children from drifting into violence, to engage the early warning signs, to get the necessary counseling and mental health services. I know that Mrs. Gore and Hillary have both been heavily involved in a lot of these issues for a long time.

And I want to say a special word of appreciation to the parents who are here, to the teachers who are here, and to the students who are here, because I believe that they may have more to say to us about what the rest of us should do than we can imagine.

So to all of you, thank you for coming. Let's leave here today resolved to be, all of us, a part of this national campaign, and I want us to have a good conversation about where we go from here.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:43 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Jiang Zemin of China. The President also referred to the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS); and the American Broadcasting Corporation (ABC).

### **Remarks Following the White House Strategy Meeting on Children, Violence, and Responsibility and an Exchange With Reporters**

*May 10, 1999*

**The President.** Please be seated, everyone. We're getting our group up here, you see. It's a little slow—it's a large and, as you can see, diverse and distinguished group. We just had a wonderful meeting in the East Room of the White House. We had not only the Vice President and Tipper and Hillary and I, but many members of our administration and four Members of Congress: Senator Brownback and Senator Reid and Leader Gephardt and Representative Jennifer Dunn were there.

And we listened to several hours of discussions; over 40 people spoke, many of them already heavily involved in the efforts to give our children a safe childhood and protect them from violence.

This was exactly the kind of session I had hoped for, where everyone was talking about the problems and the opportunities; everyone was talking about what could be done to accept responsibility. No one was pointing the finger of blame.

In the weeks and months ahead, as we launch our national campaign to prevent youth violence, we will build on the strong foundation of this day and on many of the things which have been said and many of the people who have said them.

I want to say a special word of appreciation to the young people who are here today and who are working in their own communities to try to help their fellow students have a safe and wholesome life.

As the national campaign gets underway, we know we'll have to overcome the old ways of doing business. We've seen some of that today as well, in the remarkable support that gun manufacturers have given to many of our commonsense gun proposals. We see in the